



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

*Still Turning People's Worlds **Upside Down***



Why
Justification
By Faith Alone
Is Still Our
Defining
Doctrine

Also In This Issue:

us & Them

Encouraging Widows

Do You Own the Bible?

From Pastor Dennis

Us and Them

All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people, like Us, are We
And everyone else is They.

by Rudyard Kipling, from "A Friend of the Family"

Author David Berreby, in his book, *Us and Them: Understanding Your Tribal Mind*, published by Little, Brown and Company, 2005, reminds us that "attitudes die hard. 'A white person and a black person in today's New York City can agree over coffee that race is all in your mind,' Berreby contends. 'But when they leave Starbucks and raise their hands to hail a taxi, the white person is more likely to get a cab. In that moment, race is as real as gravity.'"

UCSF psychiatry professor Dr. Arthur J. Deikman shows how the poison of prejudice spreads within cults in *Them and Us: Cult Thinking and the Terrorist Threat*, Bay Tree Publishing, 2003. In a chilling case study of two cult members, Deikman explores four basic cultish behaviors: compliance with the group; dependence on a leader; devaluing the outsider; and avoiding dissent.

Did you get that? The process starts with wanting to be in a "group," then following and lifting up the group leader, almost revering him/her, then devaluing all "outsiders," and not disagreeing with the group leader, or else you're put out of the group. Sometimes this even happens at church, doesn't it? You see little groups or cliques form, who become quite enamored with themselves and spend most or all their time with their "group," and even have special hugs, signals and "code" words or phrases. Of course they think what THEY are doing for Christ is the most important ministry in the church!

What is it about our human condition that causes prejudice and racism and elitism? In the church at Corinth, Paul tried to break down the religious factions caused by pride, competition and jealousy; one group was

overly proud that they were "disciples" of Paul, others revered Peter, others Apollos and others claimed they were Christ's special followers (elitism) - 1 Cor. 1:10 - Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. Paul asks (v. 13), "Is Christ divided?" and of course the answer is "no."

James identifies this as a spiritual problem - James 4:1-2 - What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.

In February we preach and pray and meditate about reconciliation with God and with other people. We do battle wicked spirits (Ephesians 6:11-12). But let us also realize that our biggest enemy can be our own pride and a fierce spirit of "Us versus Them." Paul says we all belong to the Lord (Romans 14). Ultimately, there is not an "Us and Them," but only "us."

The Vine

Growing Together in Christ



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Spiritual Disciplines

Do You Own the Bible?

We own our home and also take care of it, including the yard, so I am familiar with it.

Inside, I've dusted, mopped, wiped and vacuumed almost every square inch (at least the parts I can reach). Outside, I've planted, mulched, trimmed, mowed, pruned and swept every bit. Not only do we own it as a possession, but I own it in the sense of knowing it intimately.

I also own a Bible, actually several Bibles. They are my possessions. But it's not enough just to possess a Bible. Many people own at least one, but sadly many of those same people have no idea, or the wrong idea, of what's inside. They own a Bible, but they don't own the Bible.

You may have heard about programs to help you read the Bible in one year, and you can also buy one that guides you through the year. This is probably a good way to get familiar with the book as a whole, but you still won't own it. In a Christian magazine I saw a one-sentence piece of advice that's guiding me right now: "Study a book of the Bible until you own it."

Last year in Palm Springs, theologian Dallas Willard suggested we memorize scripture as a way to let the Word of God sink deeply into our hearts. He says memorization is the primary discipline for the thought life. He recommended Colossians 3:1-17 as a place to start, so I decided to memorize it, and I'm starting to own it.

As I began memorizing, some phrases intrigued me and I wanted to know more. So I opened a commentary about Colossians and found out more than I wanted to know! Well, not really, just more than I bargained for and some I didn't really understand. But it's interesting and has provided some nuggets of knowledge and inspiration.

In a notebook, I've written the verses I want to memorize first. I check it to help me keep on track. When I awaken in the middle of the night, I try reciting (silently of course) until I fall back asleep.



Dallas Willard, in his book, *Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice* (a companion book to *Renovation of the Heart*), says: "The desired effect will not be realized by focusing on isolated verses but will come as we ingest passages such as Romans 5:1-8 or 8:1-15, 1 Corinthians 13, or Colossians 3:1-17. When we take these into our mind, our mind will become filled with the light of God himself."

Scripture memorization isn't as easy for adults as it is for children, but as Dallas Willard says, our minds are made for it, and God wants us to do it. He will help us as we try, and cheer us on as we need encouragement. If we keep at it, we'll eventually own our Bibles as never before.

In a world where many let their thoughts wander where they may, Scripture memorization can help us focus our thoughts on our loving God and be filled with his light.

- *By Tammy Tkach*

Suggestions For Encouraging Widows

Apart from the outreach of the church, there are many ways individuals can encourage widows on their journey. But it's often hard to know what to say, for fear of making things worse. So let me offer some "Please do" as well as some "Please do not" suggestions.



1. Please do stay connected. Do not assume we need "space" to grieve. There is already a huge hole in our universe.

2. Please do say you are sorry for our loss. Do not tell us you understand, unless you do from personally experiencing the loss of a spouse. We would rather you tell us you do not know what to say than tell us the story of losing your friend or even close relative. We may be able to listen to your story later, but not now.

3. Please call and ask specific questions, such as "Can we go for a walk together? May I run errands for you? Meet you for coffee?" Do not say, "Call me if you need anything."

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DVD Review

The Marks of a Cult

Marks of a Cult is the latest in a series of DVDs produced by The Apologetics Group and hosted by Eric Holmberg. This presentation seeks to answer some of the following questions: Why are Baptists properly considered Christians, but Mormons are not? Why is the Jehovah's Witness religion classified as an anti-Christian cult while Presbyterians, Wesleyans and Pentecostals are simply seen as denominations within the Christian faith? How does one differentiate between true Biblical Christianity and an aberrant religious movement? And just what are the marks of a cult?

The presentation describes cults through the four marks developed originally by Watchman Fellowship. These are easy to remember and are helpful in forming a framework around which we can differentiate a cult from a church. The marks are as simple as add, subtract, multiply and divide.

Add: Cults add to Scripture. The revelation of God provided in the Bible is never sufficient for a cult. Thus they must add to the written revelation of Scripture, usually with additional scriptures or with their own translation of the Bible. In this way we have books such as *The Pearl of Great Price* of the Mormons and the *New World Translation* of the Bible produced by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Since the Bible claims exclusivity as the written revelation of God, we must see that other books, even if the followers of cults claim that they are equal to the Bible, must actually be over and above the Word of God.

Subtract: Cults subtract from the person of Christ. Cults cannot tolerate the divinity and exclusivity of Jesus and thus usually reduce Him to being a created being. In some cases they make Jesus only a manifestation or mode of God. In



either case, the role of Jesus as revealed in Scripture is diminished.

Multiply: Cults multiply the requirements of salvation. Salvation, as it is presented in the Scriptures, is by God's grace through faith alone. Cults continually add to the requirements of salvation, always adding human works as a necessary prerequisite to salvation. No cult teaches or endorses justification by faith alone. Thus all cults reject the very heart of the gospel.

Divide: Cults divide the loyalty of believers. Each cult believes that it has exclusive revelation and understanding of God that ensures its followers are either exclusively God's people or are somehow more blessed than others. Cults always seek to divide believers against each other based on the previous three marks. Thus cults are, by their very nature, divisive.

Each of these receives a good deal of attention within the presentation. Each one is proven to be true within the belief systems of several different cults including the Seventh Day Adventists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, The Moonies, and Oneness Pentecostals (or the Jesus-Only Movement). Each receives the attention of a large group of highly-regarded Christian apologists.

Marks of a Cult is well-researched, well-made and the facts presented are well-documented. This is a rational, measured, convicting examination of the marks of a cult as they stand against the claims of Scripture. In fact, my only disappointment was in the bonus features which included nothing more than a list of recommended websites and a second list of recommended books dealing with each of the cults - A small complaint. I am glad to recommend this DVD to you. - By *Tim Challies* - an evangelical blogger & editor of *Discerning Reader* Full review at: <http://www.challies.com/archives/dvd-reviews/dvd-review->

Their errant belief...is connected to an errant understanding of the person and nature of Christ. To down play the deity of Christ is to ultimately surrender the doctrine of justification. - The Marks of a Cult Video

[mark.php](#)

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DVD Review

Proceed With Caution

The road of anti cult material can have its hazards. First of all the term "cult" itself can be highly inflammatory. It brings to the surface a wide variety of emotion, thought and specific groups.

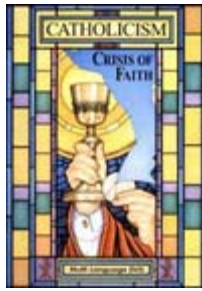
So one approaches anti cult material with a little bit of caution. You are never quite sure where the authors are coming from. Individual cult experience can be much like the story of the five blind men touching different parts of an elephant. Each has his own experience different from the others. I view it as a continuum between positive and negative experiences, with everyone in the organization experiencing a different spot on that continuum.

I believe genuine concern and compassion also need to be present in any who attempt to criticize the beliefs of others. If it isn't there, anti-cult authors can look like they are cold, uncaring and a bit self righteous. And even those whose motivation is compassion toward those hurt by cults may take an intellectual, or doctrinal approach or one that comes across as setting themselves up as *the* discerners of what is true. In doing so they can be more of a hindrance to the very people they are trying to help.

All this said I think the three DVD's reviewed in *the Vine* this month have value.

Although classifying cults can have its difficulties, *The Marks of a Cult* add, *subtract, multiply and divide* paradigm is very useful to the topic of cult dynamics. The video tends toward the analytical and apologetic approach. Unfortunately, with its eerie soundtrack it conjures up images of the extreme and notorious cults such as Jim Jones or Heaven's Gate. None of whom are mentioned in the video.

The other two DVD's cover Roman Catholicism and Seventh-day Adventism. Covering these two organizations in the context of cults also presents a challenge.



The compassion, love for, and desire to see the members of these organizations grasp the gospel of Jesus with its emphasis on faith alone comes mightily across.

Not wishing to enter that debate both videos present historical information which highlight the origins of a number of church doctrines. The viewer will have to decide how to classify each.

One concern here is that you assume the presenters are being fair and not just trying to frame their arguments to be sensational or paint the organization in an unnecessarily unfavorable light.

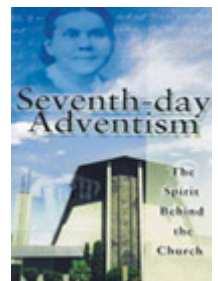
Space won't allow a more detailed review, but a few points of interest. Regarding the Seventh Day Adventist doctrine of the "investigative judgment" and "soul sleep" - the belief that people are in their graves after death and nowhere else - the video notes that these beliefs were the result compensating for the failed prophecies of William Miller regarding the return of Jesus in 1844.

The video on Roman Catholicism informs the viewer that a number of church doctrines came on the scene over a millennium after Christ. For example, the doctrine of Transubstantiation was codified in 1215 AD, Purgatory in 1217, the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the doctrine of Papal Infallibility in 1870 and the Assumption of Virgin Mary in 1950.

The real strength of both videos, however, is their interviews with former members. While the pain some have experienced sometimes comes out, the compassion, love for, and desire to see the members of these organizations grasp the gospel of Jesus with its emphasis on faith alone comes mightily across.

At the heart of their appeal is the concern that by adhering to non-Protestant beliefs members of these churches may be denying the transforming power of faith in Jesus Christ. Those interviewed clearly want others to experience what they have experienced. - *By John Siston*

All three DVDs are available from Monergism Books.



Field Trip



Acquire the Fire

Acquire the Fire (ATF) is a Christian youth event that helps transform teenagers to become passionate followers of Christ, equipping them to radically influence their community and the world. Here are selected comments from New Hope attendees.

I am very grateful that I got the chance to go to ATF and worship with other people that are on fire for God & have a passion to serve Him. - *Tiffany Perez*

The best thing about ATF is the way in which they are able to relate biblical issues with issues in the world today, and then share those ideas in a way that will interact with a teenager's brain. - *Lonnie C. Fyles*

Thank you for sending us to ATF. It was a great experience to see people come to Christ. God bless you. - *Whitney Perez*

Thank you New Hope for sending me to ATF. This was a great experience. - *Brittany Perez*

I found ATF very inspiring and hope to invite friends to come next year. - *Cassandra Alaniz*

ATF made me realize I want to be that "fish" who goes deeper into the water, going deeper with God. I don't want to be in the shallows and suffocate without God. Some-thing even more amazing happened with my friend Rusty who I met in school and came with me to ATF. He was at that stage where he was getting called to God, but he was still hesitant about him. That night everything changed! At first he wasn't really singing, then I looked at him and he was singing. The next time I looked at him his hands were in his pockets. I turned my head again and his hands were out of his pockets and raised up -- he was surrendering to God! You could really see and feel God working in everyone and in Rusty! Thank you all so much for giving us the chance to experience ATF. - *Ian Lacy*

I was grateful to be able to go to a session on how to make our youth group



dynamic and growth driven. They had us lay hands on each other and blessed us. What was most inspiring was to see how the day was changing the teens' lives. Two teens dedicated their lives to Jesus and I'm sure many others dedicated themselves to being witnesses for Him. Thank you, New Hope, for sending us to a great life-changing event. You will see the fruit developing in our teens and chaperones! - *Sheri Glaros*

ATF was an awesome experience. It is wonderful to know that there are many young people out there that love the Lord. My daughter made a wonderful decision that night and accepted Jesus into her life. God truly spoke to her that night. God answered my prayers. We both felt the Lord's presence that night and were truly moved by his spirit. - *Alicia Martinez*

Thank you for organizing this. It was my first time & I must say I was apprehensive ... not sure what I was getting myself into. But I am so glad that I went. I was moved to tears. What impacted me most was Phil Joel. I was moved by his testimony. It caused me to rethink and re-evaluate my own time with God. Seeing one of our teens accept Jesus Christ was the icing on the cake. I believe that this is a valuable event to attend. If only for the fact that one teen accepted Jesus it is worth the investment. - *Pam Morgan*

What a blessing to see youth focused on worshiping our Savior and an Organization that encourages a deeper relationship with Him. And what a pleasure to pray the sinner's prayer with Melissa who accepted Christ that day!

The event made me work harder to deepen my personal relationship with Jesus. I am blessed to have gone. - *Mat Morgan*

ATF changed my life. I accepted Jesus Christ into my life as my Lord and Savior which was the best decision I ever made. I talk to him every day now knowing that he is listening and that he loves me. It was the greatest feeling to sing and to praise the Lord that night along with other kids my age. I felt so close to God that night. It's nice to know that there are other kids out there that love and praise him as well. - *Melissa Bocanegra*

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Fire From Page 6

An ATF stadium event is like an unbelievable breath of fresh air. You literally walk into an enclosed stadium filled with people, mostly teens, who have come to worship the creator of the universe.

The music, played by live bands, and perhaps too loud for those over 40, is easy to sing and very meaningful. Large screens with the words of the songs scrolling by make it easy for everyone to sing their hearts out. A spirit of rejoicing, thankfulness and worship was on everyone there.

There were two main speakers, who spoke mainly on our culture and the powerfully negative pulls it has on young people. A well known Christian singer gave a very moving story on his journey in growing closer to God. He shared with us the advice and challenge he had received from his pastor, and how it has really transformed his life. It was very moving and convicting to me, and has led me to make a renewed commitment to follow his lead.

One of the most moving parts of the day for me was a skit put on by the Honor Academy drama team. In this drama they depicted living in this world as a Christian, struggling to do the right thing yet being so bogged down with all of the pulls of the flesh that we don't thrive in serving God and allowing Him to do His work through us.

In the skit, Christ's' second coming became a reality and the main character in the skit found himself standing before the judgment seat of Christ. As his entire life went before him, he became acutely aware of all the things he could have done differently. Things that he was sure he would have done differently because of his Christian beliefs, but didn't. He also experienced the unfathomable love, forgiveness and acceptance of Christ.

After having experienced Christ face to face, he had an overwhelming feeling of wishing he had done better, not out of any feeling of guilt or condemnation, but rather out of an overwhelming feeling of thankfulness, love of and desire to serve Christ. And then -- He woke up. Wow! What a dream. It seemed so real. It's as if he has a

second chance to live the way he really wants to, with renewed commitment, not allowing the world to water him down. He realizes, in staying close to God, with Christ's' help, he can do it.

I would like to thank the members of New Hope for the financial assistance in allowing so many of our teens to attend ATF. I feel confident that many seeds were planted in the hearts and minds of our young people as well as the rest of us who went.

- *Nick Glaros*

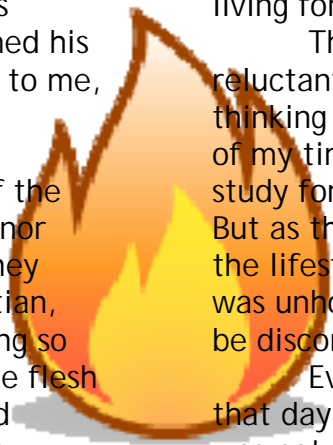
Thank you for sponsoring our trip to Acquire the Fire in Anaheim. It truly was a very significant experience for me as well as others. This trip was especially important for me at this time in my life because as I spend more and more time with my friends, I become absorbed in the sinful lifestyle of living for personal gain.

The morning of the event, I was reluctant to even get out of bed to go, thinking that it was just going to be a waste of my time; I could be using that time to study for the upcoming midterms at school. But as the day progressed, I remembered that the lifestyle I had been leading, up until then, was unholy, and therefore my behavior should be discontinued.

Even though I was personally revived that day to the way I should be living, that was not the highlight of the day. Ian Lacy had brought a friend that day because of his recent interests to learn more about God. At first, I thought he was just some weird friend of his, but as I became acquainted with him, we became friends. His name is Rusty, and his transformation that day was amazing.

Throughout the course of the day, he came to know more about our Lord Jesus Christ, and became more enthusiastic about becoming close, personal friends with him than I have been in a long time. Now this is the best part: Rusty, my new friend, accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior that day. It was incredible to see God working within us all that day. Thank you for your support in sending us there and helping my friend become my brother in The Great Body of Jesus Christ. - *Daniel Leon*

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By Grace Through Faith

Why Justification By Faith Alone Is Still Our Defining Doctrine.

Evangelicals who visit Rome cannot help but enjoy the stately buildings and stirring sense of history. A few like it so much they never leave. Such is the case with Francis Beckwith, former president of the Evangelical Theological Society. In April, the Baylor University philosopher rejoined the Roman Catholic Church... *To continue reading this article please see <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/july/19.20.html> A Christianity Today editorial posted 7-13-2007 Copyright 2007 Christianity Today.*

Widows From Page 3

4. Please refer to our husband's acts and words, both serious and humorous. We are so comforted by knowing our husband has not been forgotten.

5. Please invite us to anything. We may decline but will appreciate being asked. Do not assume we no longer want to participate in couples events.

6. Please accept that we are where we are. Marriages are brief, long, healthy, dysfunctional, intense, remote. Death comes suddenly or in tiny increments over years. Again, our experiences are so different, as are we. So are our journeys through grief. Do not assume we go through the grief process "by the book."

7. Do say, "I've been thinking of you" rather than make a conversation-only offer, such as "We'll call you, and we'll go out to dinner"—unless you can follow up. We'd love that, too. *Miriam Neff Copyright © 2008 Christianity Today. 1-18-2008*

Fire From Page 7

I *loved* acquire the fire! I would go again in an instant. Everything that was said about making the time to talk to Jesus and standing up for your faith touched me immensely. Something about the praise and worship got to my heart as well. The words were of God, it was evident.

I have many friends that aren't Christian and many friends that are. I need to trust in God more and let Him lead me in speaking to them about Jesus. I plan it out in my head what they'll say, but I could be wrong. I get nervous and I know if I just take a deep breath and start talking it'll all be fine because God is with me; I just need to start.

I think about things way too much especially in school. I need to just trust God, trust Him with everything. I'm getting much better. Since ATF I've attempted to wake up early every morning to spend more time with Him and I plan on doing so forever. The Bema (Drama) made me think more about my future. I've wanted to go on a mission trip for a long time and I hope to do so in the near future because I feel my call is to help others.

I love going to the Homeless Shelter and feeding people. I love doing it; I don't care about the hours. I wish I could do it for a job. I definitely love giving and helping with a passion. It's something inside me that just feels so great.

At ATF I was thinking of things I could do to glorify the Lord and set a better Christian example to those around me. I am involved in a Youth and Government program at my school. I've learned so much from participating, but it is expensive and I've been seriously considering quitting.

During ATF, when the guy in charge said get involved with government and your school and make a difference, God told me not to quit and to stand up for my rights during the debates that happen. We talk professionally about laws being passed and if they should or shouldn't. We've talked about gay marriage being legal and other topics that so many people, I've found out, agree with and with other topics that are wrong but people with strong opinions speak out on. I feel more motivated and thrilled to speak up now. Again, I need to trust everything with God, I can't live by relying on myself; it's about Him, not me. He's working with and through me to love others and reflect Himself, so that they will come to Him and in turn help others come to Him. It's ongoing and I need to trust Him so that He can work in me.

-Jessica Morgan

